

Haught, John F. 2021. **The Cosmic Vision of Teilhard de Chardin**. Maryknoll. New York: Orbis Books. 260 pages paperback. ISBN: 9781-62698-4493.

Persons in recent years who have been engaged in the science & religion dialogue are quite familiar with the theological perspective of Dr. John Haught, and they will welcome this short and readable book as something of a summary of his life work. More than this, however, it is a compelling synthesis and elaboration of the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whom Haught explains was a mentor, whose newly published writings in the 1960s were formative in Haught's own thinking. Even for those of us who for years now have been reviewing and discussing Teilhard's work, there is much to learn from these 260 pages. For instance, I did not know how influential was Teilhard's thought and vision on the discussions and pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council, which, in so many ways, "opened up" the Catholic Church to evolutionary and cosmological critical thinking.

Although much of Haught's discussion here is framed by references to traditional doctrine through the centuries, the observations about Teilhard's influence go far beyond Catholicism. Particularly intriguing for me is the chapter on Paul Tillich, since as a graduate student at the University of Chicago Divinity School, I had a seminar with Dr Tillich during the last year of his life. In the summer of 1960 Tillich spent two months talking theology with scholars in Japan which he acknowledged (in his last book The Future of Religions, published posthumously) opened him up to many insights from Asian religious thought. I remember in that seminar (which Tillich team-taught with Mircea Eliade), Tillich reflected in one class how he wished that he had made that trip to Asia earlier in his life. What would a Volume 4 of Systematic Theology have looked like?

The value of this book, in a word, is the way Haught brings us "up to date" so to speak with contemporary, on the edge, theology as we launch deeper into the 21st century. The frame for all of Haught's theology, we know, is the contemporary scientific consensus that we – as humans on this earth – are living in an open universe whose destiny we – yes, we – as participants are helping to shape.

From Haught's writings over the last four decades, we learn that the universe is a cosmic story – with a history, to be sure -- but it is a drama unfolding, with us humans as participants in the play. Haught often bemoans the fact that too many theologians, while acknowledging this truth, have not revised their thinking and are wedded still to what Haught calls the “fixist” notions of the world, which surreptitiously assumes the stance of scientific materialism. As Haught explains in compelling detail, Teilhard provides us with a vision of the future that is both consistent with our scriptural heritage and is congenial with modern science.

This book is well structured – there are thirteen chapters in this book, each with a specific focus, on topics such as hope, action, spirituality, God, suffering, religion, even ending with transhumanism. Moreover, though most of us have read all of Teilhard's books in English, perhaps few (until now) could say what Teilhard thinks about these topics. Haught makes that clear, but he also puts Pierre's thoughts into the context of Augustine, Galileo, Darwin, Einstein, Hawking, Medawar, Moltmann, Tillich, Whitehead and – yes – Jesus. In the process, Haught makes his own astute observations about these subjects, and also crowns his arguments with an occasional pithy (and profound) memorable phrase, such as “we are part of a great cosmic project.” and, referencing G. Manley Hopkins, “the universe is more epiphany than promise.” By way of a summary (page 190), Haught says: “...in full agreement with Teilhard, we need a whole new worldview – a metaphysics of the future – in which to fashion a truly big and thick history.... What makes it possible in the age of science to link religion tightly to the cosmic story is that the universe itself has a dramatic makeup.... The newly discovered fact of a universe still coming into being, provides a refreshing framework for understanding that the age of religion is an essential new episode in the drama of a cosmos awakening to the Absolute Future that we call God.” So be it.